

YOUR WEEK IN CHINA'S CAPITAL

今日北京

# BEIJING TODAY

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## 'Abortion Capital' China's Most Unwanted Title

Poor sex ed and a flippant attitude to the act have resulted in 13 million abortions per year. **Page 4**



## Bus Accidents a Legacy of School Merging

The government's aggressive merging of rural schools has put students at risk. **Page 6**



## Exploitation Films Blasted by Directors

Variety show cash grabs are on the menu for this Spring Festival's cinemas. **Page 5**



## Basement Dwellers Get the Boot

Thousands of bomb shelters built as part of the capital's strategic defence have become illegal residences thanks to their ownership being a gray area. But Beijing is determined to reclaim the underground units in a campaign that will last through March. **Page 3**

## Courts to Admit Electronic Messages as Evidence

BY LYNNE WANG

The Chinese Supreme Court issued a new judicial interpretation of the Civil Procedure Law that enables courts to admit emails, chat logs and micro-blog posts as evidence in civil trials on February 4.

Though electronic data has been used in civil cases since 2012, the interpretation marks the first time the nation's top court formally defined them as an admissible type of evidence.

The court defined electronic data as messages formed or stored through electronic media such as email, electronic data exchange, online chatting, blogging, micro-blogging and short message services.

"With the popularity of the Internet and digital technology, we need to adopt

electronic evidence in civil cases. But previously such data could only be used as supporting evidence after being notarized and transferred to documentary evidence. This marks a big leap," said Zhang Weiping, a professor of law at Tsinghua University.

Two days after the release of the interpretation, the court of Pudong, Shanghai announced its findings in a WeChat case.

Last July, Shenzhen Niuzhangzhi Pharmaceutical sued a Shanghai-based investment firm for defaulting on 50,000 yuan. While the latter denied the charge, the former presented a piece of digital evidence: an IOU with the seal of the defendant pictured and transferred by WeChat.

However, the court ultimately refused to accept the digital picture as the evidence because the plaintiff could not prove the

physical existence of the IOU or whether the authenticity of the picture.

"From past experience, judicial admission of electronic data is quite rare. It will probably not change too much with this new interpretation," says Feng Jing, judge of the People's Court in Pudong, Shanghai.

"The quality of the evidence doesn't meet the weight it carries. In the WeChat case, it's difficult to regard a digital message as key evidence in court," Feng says. "Numerous netizens log on to WeChat through QQ and other types of accounts instead of phone numbers."

In the digital age, establishing a real-name system for accounts may be the best way to resolve the dilemma of obtaining electronic evidence, *Legal Evening News* wrote in an editorial. ■

## CHINESE STOCK INDEXES

### SSE (Shanghai)

| Close    | Change          | YTD    |
|----------|-----------------|--------|
| 3,173.42 | ▲ 15.71 (0.50%) | -1.88% |

### SZSE (Shenzhen)

| Close     | Change          | YTD    |
|-----------|-----------------|--------|
| 11,302.73 | ▲ 37.11 (0.33%) | +2.62% |

### HSI (Hong Kong)

| Close     | Change           | YTD    |
|-----------|------------------|--------|
| 24,422.15 | ▲ 107.13 (0.44%) | +3.49% |

Accurate to market close on February 12, 2015





## Aged Residents Team Up to Build Elevator

BY LYNNE WANG

**F**ew things are as humiliating for elderly residents as being unable to climb the stairs of their own home. For residents in the Dong Huashibeli Community in Dongcheng District, this indignity has been a daily occurrence.

Like many of Beijing's older buildings, the community's apartments are fewer than six floors high and thus exempt from city requirements to provide an elevator.

But the residents, many of whom are in their 70s and 80s, could not bear the daily climb and pooled their resources to build an elevator on February 6.

One 70-year-old resident, a man surnamed Jin, led the project. Jin is a graduate of Tsinghua University with a degree in precision instruments. Although he looks healthier and stronger than many of his supporters, Jin has struggled with the daily

climb since 2011.

"After talking with property management in our community, I applied to the local Department of Construction to install a straight ladder for our unit. I was told that there was no reserved space for us to do that," Jin said.

But Jin didn't give up. Last year he discovered an unused stairlift. Unlike traditional vertical ladders, a stairlift is similar to an electronic chair that can be installed on a track that runs parallel to the spiral stairs.

Without occupying any extra space, the lift can carry people upstairs or downstairs, one at a time, within five minutes.

After contacting with a vendor in Shenzhen, Jin began to mobilize his neighbors to raise funds for the equipment.

"In our unit, the oldest man was 81 years old and there are several in their 70s. We get on well with each other and we all know the importance of an elevator. It didn't take me too much time to persuade them," Jin said.

With the funds, Jin flew to Shenzhen to check the safety and stability of the elevator. They spent 160,000 yuan to buy and install the unit.

"For old residential buildings, the lack of elevators is a growing problem – especially with China's rapidly aging society," says Shu Kexin, an expert on public issues. "It's reasonable to improve the comfort level of residential buildings based on neighborhood consensus and self-raised funds," Shu said.

But whether self-funded residential facilities will bring about legal problems is another question.

"Raising funds for constructing extra facilities is simple, but further maintenance is hard. Once the facilities are added, residents will have to hire third-party organizations to conduct operation and maintenance," said Bao Hua, a local lawyer.

Another problem is safety. "Unlike shopping malls and offices, which have spacious areas to install safety equipment, old buildings offer very limited space. How to balance the daily use of new facilities and their safety is a big question," Bao said. ■

had to get out of the car and take the back roads around the gate to avoid trouble.

"It felt like I was a thief," Wu said.

But the lack of an ID has brought Wu more danger than embarrassment. The 63-year-old has high blood pressure and serious complications due to diabetes. However, he cannot register to visit any legal hospital since he does not have an ID card. Wu is also unable to draw a pension even though he has paid into the nation's social security program for decades.

More miserably, Wu was charged with defrauding the insurance company when he used his brother's ID and medical insurance card to have surgery when one of his retinas became detached. "We had no alternative. My husband needed emergency surgery and we couldn't afford to pay the medical fees upfront," said Zuo Liping, his wife.

The Tuanjiehu police agreed to correct the household residential information for Wu in January after recognizing that the Wu Zhiwei registered in Beijing Assembly Company was in fact Wu Zhicheng.

Since the 1970s, China has restricted rural hukou holders from upgrading to an urban hukou. Each family's hukou is kept and managed by the police. All movement of hukou is handled by the police, and individuals are unable to check their personal information.

"The household residential system has been updated twice since the 1970s. There are many people with missing IDs like Wu," said an officer at the Department of Household Registration at the Tuanjiehu police. ■



## Tongzhou Villager's Quest for Legal ID Ends

BY LI RUIQI

**A**fter 43 years of struggling for an identity, Wu Zhicheng, a villager in Baimiao Village, Tongzhou, finally obtained a legal temporary ID from a Chaoyang branch of the Public Security Bureau on February 3. Wu is expected to receive his legal, permanent ID card today.

Wu is one of many people around the country identified as a "heihu," or a naturally born Chinese citizen without any legal form of identity.

The national ID card system began in 1984 and all citizens were required to apply for a card. However, Wu's hukou had already been lost by this time and he was unable to apply.

Theoretically, Wu should have had a collective hukou through his assigned workplace at Beijing Assembly Company. However, the "Wu" registered through the company was actually his brother, Wu Zhiwei.

Wu was marked as "emigrated" on his rural hukou in Baimiao Village while his brother was still registered as a resident. "They apparently mistook my brother Wu Zhiwei for myself when moving my hukou from Baimiao village to my workplace in 1972," Wu said.

As an unidentified person, Wu couldn't buy tickets or travel outside Beijing for the past 43 years. He was routinely detained at traffic checkpoints until colleagues or neighbors came to the police station to explain the situation. To avoid trouble, Wu avoided going out for years until his father-in-law became critically ill in Tianjin in 2014. Wu asked a relative to give him a lift to Tianjin. When they approached a traffic check near a tollgate, Wu

## Dongguan's Sex Industry Back With a Vengeance

BY YANG XIN

**T**he Guangdong Public Security Department was forced to make the embarrassing announcement on January 23 that the city's notorious sex industry was back in full swing only one year after its supposed cleanup.

Approximately a year ago, the nation began a crackdown on prostitution in Dongguan, Guangdong province. Locals called the crackdowns "typhoons" which usually left as quickly as they came. But the last crackdown, which continued through the last four months of 2014, was comparatively fierce.

*Beijing Youth Daily* found that as many as 70 percent of the entertainment venues closed by police had been allowed to reopen as "vice-free" establishments. The list includes 631 foot massage centers, 465 karaoke bars and 38 saunas, according to the Public Security Department of Guangdong.

But the claim that vice is gone from Dongguan's venues is highly suspicious.

Dongguan's sex industry has merely shifted from half-open to being wholly underground, *Chongqing Youth Daily* reported on January 29. The report quotes Zhang Mingcheng, a notorious john known to many of the city's sex workers, as saying sex work has shifted to home service and phone appointments.

"You don't see sex workers walking around on the streets during the day anymore. They've become more prudent, since prostitution now carries a 5,000 yuan fine," Zhang said.

Apart from the one-on-one service, a standardized sex service chain has become attached to local hotels scattered throughout the city. Hotel managers help their patrons to recruit sex workers and deliver them directly to designated rooms.

"The sex workers in hotels are almost as common as waitresses. They charge up to 1,000 yuan, which is much more expensive than what it used to cost," Zhang said.

An obvious effect of the crackdown has been a three- to five-times increase in the cost of sexual services. Zhang said his favorite prostitute is a migrant worker who didn't enter the industry until the recent crackdown drove its prices much higher.

Even Yuan Baocheng, the mayor of Dongguan, said he could never hope to guarantee any effort to stamp out the city's sexual underground, the *Chongqing Youth Daily* reported. ■

# Beijing's Bomb Shelters Becoming Illegal Homes

BY DIAO DIAO

More than half of Beijing's 12,217 bomb shelters are being illegally rented as homes, according to a report by Capital University of Economic and Business (CUEB) and the Beijing Air Defense and Disaster Prevention Bureau.

CUEB Professor Lü Shuran said the bomb shelters are being rented by property management companies or the former owners of adjoining rooms. Many shelters are subdivided for rent to even more people.

The Fanggu Community in Fengtai District was found to have more than 200 people living in the bomb shelters under its residential buildings.

Floor plans for Fanggu show that the second underground level was assigned for use in air defense. However, the spacious shelter has been sectioned off into rooms for impoverished families in the years since construction ended. Today, wet clothes hang throughout its dark corridors.

An agent for the community said underground tenants would be thrown out by March and see their rental agreements terminated.

The Beijing Air Defense and Disaster Prevention Bureau said the second underground floor is usually assigned for air defense and there are clear rules to prohibit renting. Even the first underground floor can be only used to store equipment.

In some cases, the bomb shelters have been remodeled in a way that turns them into safety hazards, Lü said.

Tian Zhihua, vice director of project management at the Beijing Air Defense and Disaster Prevention Bureau, said many government departments cooperated from April 2011 to March 2014 to recover more than 2,300 illegally used underground spaces. Director Zhou Xiaoping said the effort would continue through the next three years.

Although the underground space was built to have use during both wartime and peacetime, the rules on peacetime use need to be reevaluated to prevent a repeat of illegal renting, Lü said.

Notices about how to use the underground space were posted in 2012. Acceptable uses include charity education projects, storage, office space, parking, cultural events and sports, as long as these activities did not change the original structure of the bomb shelter.

But with ownership of the structures often difficult to determine, standardizing their use became exceptionally difficult, Lü said.

Tian Zhihua said the first level of the basement belongs to the property management group's investors while the bomb shelter level theoretically belongs to the country.

Some districts are already attempting to clean up their use of the city's bomb shelters.

The Zifangyuan Community in Fengtai District has started to use its bomb shelters as legal dormitories with the help of the Fengtai Civil Defense Regulation Department and Fengtai House Management Center. ■

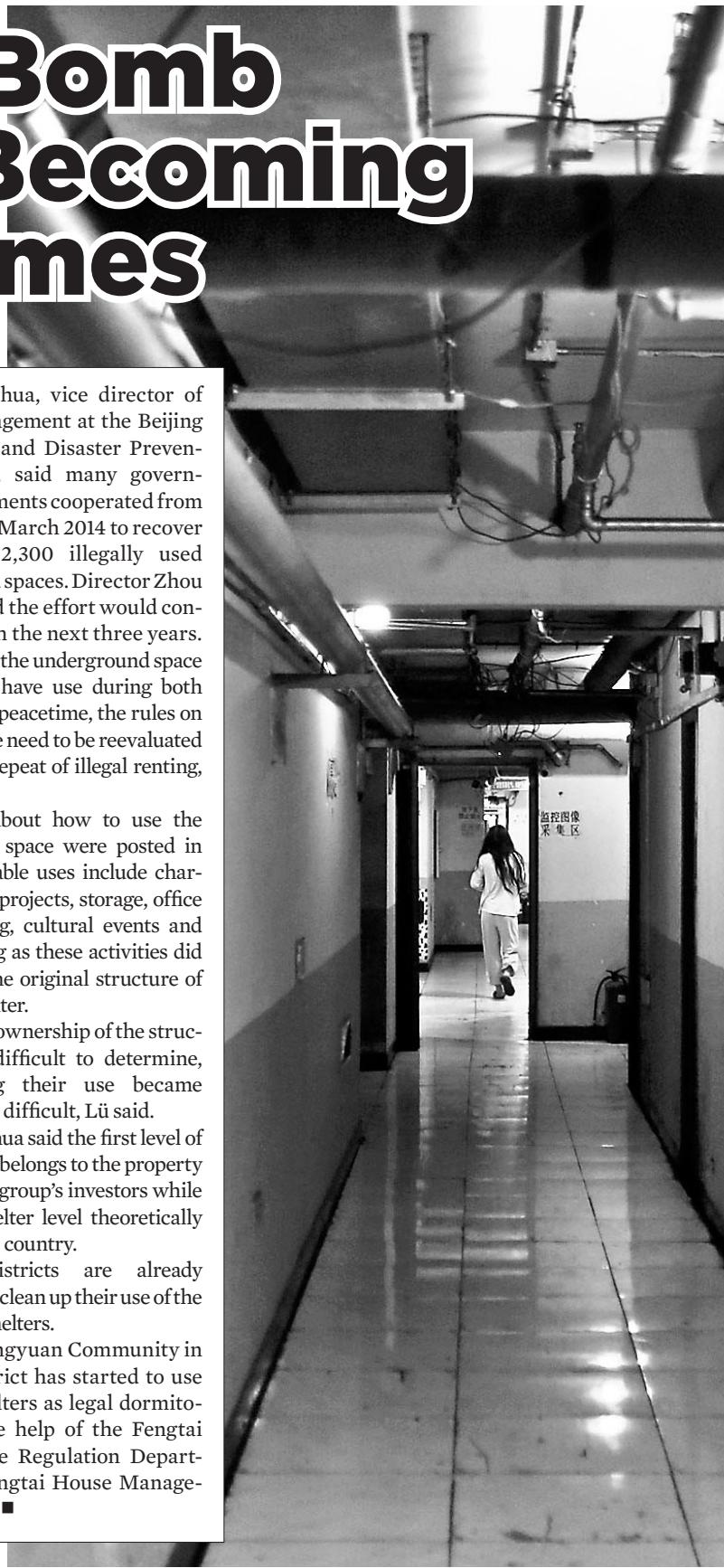


Photo by CFP

# Mistress Busting Business Touches Legal Gray Area

BY YANG XIN

While conventional logic holds that extramarital affairs are the top killer of modern Chinese marriages, the municipality of Chongqing seems to be an exception. Official statistics show that among the 100,000 divorced couples in the city, fewer

than 2,000 divorced because of a "third party intervention."

"But in real life, the number is probably higher," said Yu Feng, director of Chongqing Jialijiawai Marriage and Family Counseling and Service Center.

Yu's firm is one of many specializing in the new business of driving out mistresses from otherwise happy families. He said his firm has chased out more than 100 mistresses in the past two years. His team works with lawyers, marriage analysts and psychologists to provide its "mistress fighting" service.

Mistresses are more often a symptom than a cause of a broken marriage, Yu said. Through counseling sessions and interventions, Yu's team attempts to get the couples to focus on what brought them together and to build a strong economic foundation for long-term stability.

Insiders have been questioning the hidden risk of the seemingly 'welcomed' profession.

"There is possibility that mistresses could

hire such services to make themselves the customers too. A worse situation is that someone could pretend to be mistresses and collude with such service institutions for money," said Guo Yuanpeng, a commentator.

Others question the qualifications of Yu and other practitioners.

"The National Professional Standard on Marriage and Family Counselor states that marriage counselors only deal with problems within a family. Obviously, mistress fighters cross the line by involving the third party into their service scope," said Qiao Zhifeng, another commentator on marriage issues.

Qiao said that lack of supervision is another hole. "Without efficient regulations, these mistress fighters could easily end up in legal limbo by using illegal means like alienation and honey-traps to achieve their aims," he said.

Qiao called on relevant departments to focus on the emerging profession and work out a way to properly manage and regulate it. ■

## THE WEEK IN WEIRD

STRANGE HAPPENINGS ON THE CHINESE NEWS WIRE  
BY SU DERUI

### Man Boosts BMW to Take Girlfriend to Work

A lust for face doomed one veteran thief who was caught stealing a BMW from a gated community and using it to drive his girlfriend to work, *Jinghua Times* reported.

Police said the man, a Changping District resident surnamed Lin, entered the community and began looking for an open window through which he could enter a villa. Inside one home, Lin stole the keys to a BMW and an Apple Mac computer.

Lin said he initially intended to search the car for valuables, but once behind the wheel the siren song of *mianzi* became too much to bear. He took the car for a joyride to impress his WeChat girlfriend.

Lin was convicted of robbery in 2007 and served four years in prison. He said he resumed his craft of breaking into people's homes and stealing their valuables so that he could appear wealthy to his girlfriend.

(*Jinghua Times*)

### Amateur Drift Racer Sinks in the Chaobai River

A Beijing man who borrowed his friend's car decided to take it out for a night of amateur drift racing: on ice.

The driver, who has not been named, reportedly crashed through the frozen surface of the Chaobai River in Shunyi District while playing with a 13-year-old Kia Optima last week.

The car fell through the ice during a fierce turn and the driver escaped through an open window. He called the owner, a man surnamed Li, who came with several friends and attempted to pull the car out of the ice using a rope.

(*Ifeng*)

### Diaoyu Islands Restaurant Forced to Rename

The Diaoyu Islands may belong to China, but they certainly don't belong to a Beijing restauranteur surnamed Lu. The property management company of the building in which Lu's restaurant is located told him to rename or get out.

Lu made a splash last year with his decision to open a Diaoyu Islands themed malatang restaurant beside several Japanese restaurants in the capital's embassy district.

The patriotically themed restaurant features a bar counter built as a replica of China's first aircraft carrier and a menu in which every item contains the characters for Diaoyu Islands.

(*China Daily*)

### Man Threatens to Bomb T3 Over Lost Passport

A man surnamed Guo threatened to bomb Terminal 3 of Beijing Capital International Airport after becoming upset with the staff's handling of his lost passport on February 6.

Police said Guo lost his passport while transferring to a flight to Zhuhai.

A security screening revealed that Guo had no explosives on him or in his luggage. He called in the bomb threat from an airport telephone.

(*Tencent*)



# Abortion Epidemic a Consequence of China's Sex Ed Neglect

BY DIAO DIAO

With more than 13 million abortions recorded each year, China is the abortion capital of the world. And that is without counting the millions of abortions carried out at illegal hospitals.

An investigation by CCTV's program News 1+1 found that more than 50 percent of abortion patients are younger than 25 years old with the youngest only 13. Data from more than 300 hospitals in 30 cities show that 31 percent are younger than 24 and 3.1 percent are younger than 19.

Nine in ten Chinese women with pre-marital sexual experience have had an abortion, according to the Institute of Population Research at Peking University. And that has doctors worried.

## Crisis for Youth

Zheng Weili, a doctor at Hangzhou's Family Planning and Technical Guidance Station, said the number of young girls coming in for abortions is alarming.

Last month, Zheng met with one 16-year-old girl who came in for an abortion. Although she attempted to advise the girl that having the surgery at such a young age could cause lasting damage to her reproductive health, the girl's response was flippant.

"Repeated abortions are so common now. We had one 17 year-old girl who



came in for two abortions in three months. Her uterus never even had a chance to heal, and the surgical damage could cause her to become infertile," said He Chaying, the station manager, in an interview with *Legal Daily*.

Many girls think the risks of abortion end with discomfort and that sex during their "safe weeks" does not require contraception, he said.

"Another 21-year-old girl who was in for her second time last month casu-

ally asked me how she ended up pregnant since she was sleeping with her boyfriend on her 'safe week.' It showed just how little they know about reproduction," He said.

He's stories are not hard to find in Beijing.

Wang Yao was pregnant for 16 weeks when her heartbroken mom took her to the hospital for an abortion. But Wang didn't think the operation was a big deal. Liu Chunlai, the doctor who treated her

at Peking University People's Hospital, said that "there was no shame or regret on her face."

## Behind the Rise

But China's alarmingly high abortion rate has less to do with the availability of abortion than with social attitudes.

Three in four children have never spoken with their parents about sex, according to statistics from the China Population Communication Center. Half of them are getting their sex education online through pornography or adult forums, where sex is often separated from responsibility or consequences.

A quarter of Chinese high school students have sex before graduation and 60 percent cite no objections to premarital sex. While an open attitude to sex is not in itself a bad thing, it becomes toxic when fewer than 5 percent of Chinese students are taught anything about reproductive health or contraception, Peng Xiaohui said.

Even among university-aged students, 88 percent know nothing about contraception and 45 percent do not know how to avoid pregnancy, according to the Family Planning Department of the Chinese Medical Association.

Although Chinese people may feel embarrassed to talk about sex, an online survey by Tencent found that 92 percent of online respondents were in favor of offering free contraceptives to young people.

But off the Internet, people look to abortion as an easy solution rather than a last resort.

Writer Han Han noted that advertisements for abortion clinics and "pain-free" abortion services abound. Many of the larger clinics buy televised advertisements and large billboards.

Netizens also complained about cultural trends that are misleading youth. Many of the new teen romance films being made include abortion as a rite of passage for school-age children.

"I think a lot of young people are getting the impression that abortion is not a big deal or that it may even be an ordinary experience," said a netizen named Ningyu.

"We often see people distributing packages of tissues on campus that have ads for abortion clinics printed on the cover," said Liu Xinyi, a student at Communication University of China. Many of her classmates said they received such tissues before and were curious how the advertisements for illegal hospitals were allowed on campus.

The low cost and high profit of the abortion industry has encouraged many unlicensed medical practitioners to seize on the opportunity.

"Abortions at private or illegal hospitals are the first choice for some young girls because these venues guarantee their privacy. But the surgeries they perform are incredibly risky," said Shi Lei, a judge at the administrative tribunal of the People's Court in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province.

China has no laws to protect children in the fetal stage, making even late-term abortions an option, Shi said.

But a change in policy will do little to solve the country's abortion woes unless families, schools and the community cooperate to educate children before they end up in the hands of the health-care system, said Hu Yukun, a professor at Peking University's Institute of Population Research. ■



Photos by 1905.com

# Directors Blast Holiday Exploitation Films

BY LI RUIQI

Spring Festival marks the peak season for the Chinese film industry with many of the year's top earners expected for release throughout the year's first quarter.

But this year's lineup is conspicuously absent of respectable films.

Feng Xiaogang, the popular comedy director and father of the so-called "Hesui" film season, lashed out on the numerous attempts to adapt popular TV variety shows for the big screen on February 9.

In an article that would have been taken as satire in any other newspaper, the *People's Daily* responded with fierce praise for *Running Man*'s film adaptation and its success at "breaking the routine of blockbusters." The paper appealed to directors to "learn from *Running Man*" instead of criticizing it and to reflect on why their own efforts have been less lucrative.

## Lucrative Business

After the movie *Where Are We Going, Dad?* grossed 700 million during Spring Festival 2014, it was inevitable that there would be imitators.

But few expected that *Running Man* would sweep the box office with ticket sales of 380 million yuan in the first week of its release.

Films adapted from popular variety shows are appealing to investors for their low cost and easy opportunity to cash out. It requires comparatively little money and effort for producers to port TV content to the big screen.

"I found the film of *Running Man* really funny, and I think

that's enough," said a viewer sur-named Wang who saw the film at Wanda Cinema.

## Feng's Protest

But directors of more traditional films seem less upset with the box office success than the slight against storytelling posted by the latest trend in exploitation.

Feng Xiaogang said that the variety shows films distorted the movie market, and that their financial success had a chilling effect for directors and producers who spend months or years developing a good film.

"When these are making such easy cash, no one will invest in a better film that requires a real commitment," said Feng, a judge on *Hidden Energy*, a Zhejiang TV reality show.

Other actors and directors protested in silence. The captain of *Running Man* Deng Chao refused to star in the film. Hong Kong director Wu Zhenyu similarly refused to join the film cast of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*

"I respect these actors and directors," Feng said. As a big shareholder in Huayi Brother, he criticized the company for investing in *Running Man*, saying the company is committing suicide as a producer.

Though the success of variety show films is often attributed to audiences taste, Feng said viewers are not to blame. He threw the blame at the foot of the Chinese film bureau for turning a deaf ear to the phenomenon.

Feng is contacting China Directors Association and China Produc-

ers Association to organize a boycott on future variety show movies.

"We filmmakers must reach an agreement. Directors and actors must consciously refuse to make such awful films," Feng said on *Hidden Energy*.

## Adapter's Defense

Ever eager to defend its stance, the *People's Daily* called Feng "weird" for criticizing a commercially successful film when he himself is a commercial film director.

But there is a world of difference between popular comedy and exploitation.

Feng made himself a household name with *The Dream Factory* in 1998. The film earned 36 million yuan on a budget of only 6 million yuan. The runaway hit was followed by *Be There or Square* (1999), *A World Without Thieves* (2004) and *If You Are the One* (2008). His comedies' earnings left established directors like Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige in the dust even as critics blasted them for their lack of artistic value and adaptation of traditional crosstalk.

"It's unfair to embrace his own box office achievements and look down upon those of others," said Zhizhniao in his Sina Weibo. "If

Feng denies the value of variety show adaptations in the film industry, he denies himself."

## Market-Oriented

But box office earnings should not be the ultimate goal of film.

According to the Investment Strategy Analysis Report of Chinese Film Industry in 2015-2020, Spring Festival blockbusters generated 6.4 billion yuan in the gap between 2012 and 2013, 2.5 billion yuan more than the previous year.

This year's season is expected to exceed that year's earning with 50 films slated for release during the 3-month span.

But good films are not necessarily top earners. A good film is one that so captures its era that it remains vital for years to come.

Filmmakers should engage in impressing the audience, making them laugh or cry, or leap to the edge of their seats, Feng said. Films that touch the heart become part of society's collective memory and last far longer than cash grabs.

While variety show adaptations may be popular, a focus on them could make the 2010s a very sad downpoint in the otherwise vibrant history of Chinese film. ■



Photo by sina.com



# Students Left to Suffer Even as School Mergings End

BY YANG XIN



Students must board in rough dormitories.

**A** school bus accident in Penglai, Shandong province killed 12 children on November 19. A second bus accident in Dongying, Shandong province killed one student and injured three on December 2.

In the last four years there have been 43 school bus accidents nationwide. October alone had three severe accidents in the provinces of Fujian, Hunan and Henan.

While the government tends to blame local schools or unqualified drivers for the accidents, it is often ignoring its own role in the tragedies: its aggressive merging of schools during the last decade that is why rural students must engage in long



Cramped vans pass for school buses.

and dangerous commutes.

## Criticized Policy

In the late 1990s, many city and county governments began the process of shutting rural schools and merging them into "central" schools at the country level. The trend became a national policy in 2001.

The results were obvious, at least in terms of pure numbers.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the number of rural elementary schools nationwide fell 52 percent in the last decade and the elementary school enrollment declined 37 percent during the same period.

The gap between these numbers offers some hints about just how far school-age children are being expected to travel. And those longer distances on national highways put many children at risk.

School bus accidents are only the most visible failure of this policy. In January, a non-profit educational organization surveyed the living conditions of students required to board at their primary schools. The findings were shocking, with most of the students victims of malnutrition and severe loneliness.

Numerous criticisms and a collapse in enrollment forced the State Council to rescind its policy in 2009.

Ironically, two years after the announcement, the merging trend ramped up even more aggressively.

In September 2012, the State Council released guidelines on the merging of rural schools. Unfortunately, these went largely ignored. The Hunan provincial government stepped in to order local administrators to halt the merging process in January 2013. It continues in Jiangxi province to this day.

## Reasons for Neglect

The series of documents released by the state council shows that local officials were asked to proceed with the policy in a manner appropriate to the local conditions.

The facts show that none of them did: and they had abundant reasons to ignore the order.

*Huashang Daily* investigated the local budget of Xixiang County in Hanzhong, Shanxi province in 2009 to learn about the effects of school merging. "The mergers saved the county almost 500 million yuan over the next 30 years," it wrote.

That's without taking into account any of the generous grants and subsidies the government earmarked for counties that complied with its former policy.

The nation's Compulsory Education Law stipulates that "relevant depart-

ments in the state council or local government, should they not fulfill the duty of financially supporting the compulsory education process, shall be ordered to rectify the situation with a time limit. In serious cases, the person-in-charge shall face administrative sanction."

It would appear local officials are violating that regulation by overlooking children's right to accessible schooling, but none has ever been held accountable.

"We worry that the State Council's guidance paper is nothing but a verbal order. Recently, local government in Nujiang, Yunnan province released a document 'planning to merge 50 elementary schools in rural villages.' While seemingly practical and detail-oriented, it could easily be overturned or forgotten. Leaders tend to declare their stances but never fulfill their promises," said Xiong Bingqi, vice president of 21st Century Education Research Institute.

Xiong's words are a reminder about one huge loophole in the process: the lack of accountability.

In Chinese governance, it's normal for superior organizations to censure their juniors. But that process becomes useless when the government's top levels are too eager to protect its lowest.

In one example, a survey found the nation's rate of elementary school dropouts has returned to levels last seen in the 1990s. The Ministry of Education stepped in to criticize the statistical approach used in the report for failing to take into account the floating population. The ministry's intent is obvious: to absolve local government of all responsibility.

"Even if the government finally reopens those abandoned elementary schools, they will never function well as long as the long-existing problems of funding and faculty loss in rural schools remain unsolved," Xiong said. ■

# Treasures of Polish Art Enter the East

BY YANG XIN



Photos by the Embassy of the Republic of Poland



**T**reasures from Chopin's Country: Polish Art from 15th-20th Centuries, an exhibition financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland and organized with the support of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland, opened on February 7.

For most of the Chinese audience, this exhibition will be their first contact with Poland, a country either unknown or associated only with Chopin's music.

The National Museum in Warsaw has brought together approximately 350 works of art from its own collections as well as exhibits borrowed from Poland's largest museums.

The exhibition is housed in the National Museum of China, which reserved more than 2,000 square meters to showcase 350 sculptures, paintings, crafts, historic weapons, medals and posters from the last 500 years.

"The exhibition is an unprecedented trial for both our countries. The curators from both sides have put much effort in and we hope the Chinese audiences can really enjoy it and learn more about Polish art, culture and history," said Małgorzata Omilanowska, the Polish minister of Culture and National Heritage.

The exhibit is divided into several sections: medieval art in the 15th century, traditional Polish art from 16th-18th centuries, art during the loss of independence and the fall of the Polish state in the late 18th century, art as "the kingdom of the spirit" in the period of oppression across the 19th century, art of the "Young Poland" period at the turn of the 20th century and modern art.

Omilanowska said Poland is the third country to have held an exhibition in China's largest museum, second after Germany and the UK.

"By naming Poland as Chopin's country, we can use Chopin's international celebrity to attract more people to come and experience the royal lives, the religions, the customs and the influence of Asian and European culture on our central European country," she said. ■

## National Museum in Beijing

◎ Through May 10  
★ 16 Dong Chang'an Jie, Dongcheng

# Anniversary of Bilateral Ties Brings Swiss Elements to Town

BY YANG XIN

In January 1950, a short telegram stating that Switzerland would recognize the People's Republic of China marked the beginning of an extraordinary journey for the two nations. In the 65 years since, relations between the two have flourished.

"Following the farsighted decision of the Swiss diplomacy to recognize – only a few months from its inception – the People's Republic of China, mutual contact has been consistent and proactive, resulting in the setting up of many milestones," said Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, the Swiss

Minister of Finance.

"This year's anniversary of the establishment of bilateral relations between China and Switzerland is a perfect opportunity not just to celebrate the past, but also to celebrate the present and to set out to climb to new heights of cooperation in the future," said Ambassador Jean-Jacques de Dardel.

Within the anniversary framework, the Embassy has set a busy agenda to honor the longstanding partnership. High-level bilateral meetings, regular dialogues, intensive

economic and scientific cooperation and a rich cultural program will characterize what may be a breakthrough year.

As leading innovators, Switzerland and China have also paved the way for their private enterprises to intensify exchange in a multitude of fields, among which the scientific and technological sectors stand out.

The landings of the Solar Impulse's plane in two Chinese cities during its attempted world tour, alongside the Far East Tour of the renowned Basel Sym-

# China, Russian Youth Meet to Celebrate New Year

BY YANG XIN



Photo by the Russian Embassy in Beijing

**T**he Sino-Russian Youth Exchange Year that began last year is being extended through 2015 with a celebration party held on February 5 at the Russian Embassy in Beijing.

More than 80 Chinese and Russian teens from universities in Beijing were invited to the party. After a brief visit to the embassy's garden and office building, Ambassador Andrey Ivanovich Denisov welcomed them.

"2015 marks the second year of the Sino-Russian Youth Exchange Year program. I hope our two countries can further their communication and exchange on youth organizations and youth development," Denisov said.

Both the Chinese and Russian students prepared brilliant song and dance performances to celebrate the New Year and enjoyed traditional festival foods.

The students collaborated to make cards to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War and War Against Japanese Aggression.

"I rarely had chance to get in touch with Russians before. Activities like this could help boost Chinese and Russian students' mutual understanding," said Xiao Jiao, a student at Beijing University of Technology.

The celebration party has been held for four years since 2011 with more than 400 Chinese teens visiting the Russian Embassy to celebrate China's traditional festival with their Russian counterparts and diplomats. ■



Photo by iwatch 365

phony Orchestra and an exhibition of Swiss watchmaking culture are among the events that will honor the long-standing Sino-Swiss relations. ■

# Artistic Ceramics of the 2014 APEC Summit on Exhibit



Beijing Tiantan Art Gallery has been exhibiting its collection of artistic ceramics created for the convention hall, banquet hall and lounge of the 2014 APEC Summit since February 1.

The collection includes custom porcelain pieces used by the wives of 21 national leaders at the state banquet and 29 artistic ceramics by famous artisans such as Lu Ru and Huang Maijiu.

These porcelain works were designed and produced by Hanguang China Company, located in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. In Chinese porcelain circles, the company is known for its cutting edge china. The APEC collection is part of its porcelain series called

Hanguang china.

Hanguang china products are handmade and ceramic specialists fired at temperatures of more than 1,400 C. Authorities said the whiteness of Hanguang china is 88.5 percent, its transmittance is 56 percent, and glossiness is 98.6 percent. From an aesthetic point of view, the works deserve the title of "the elite of Chinese china."

The superior quality of its Hanguang china won the company the contacts to develop custom-made china for the state banquet in 2010 World Expo, 2014 Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia(CICA) and the 2014 APEC summit.

For the 2014 APEC summit, Hanguang China Com-



Photo by Lu Xiaoting

pany produced a set called Golden Autumn of the Summer Palace. Pieces within the set utilize typical Chinese symbols of dragons, phoenixes and Xiangyun patterns. Floral decorative elements give each piece a sense of the classic beauty of traditional china. Its golden color symbolizes a flourishing and prospering China.

This exhibition is first time that these furnishings have been shown to the public since the 2014 APEC summit ended. It is a positive counterattack to the fake APEC porcelain now appearing on the market.

The exhibition marks the official start of sales for the 1,000 limited edition commemorative sets created for the wives of national leaders.

(By Shu Pengqian)

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